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JRNL 570.01: Covering Environment and Natural Resources

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JRNL 570

Covering Environment & Natural Resources

Meets Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:10 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., DAH 301

Instructor

Adjunct Professor Matthew Frank

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Office Hours

Mondays 10:00 a.m. to noon

Wednesdays 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.

And by appointment

Course Objectives

This course applies the journalistic method to the coverage of environmental science and natural resource issues. Through lectures, workshops, exercises, instructor feedback, peer review and class discussion, you will explore the field, learn how to report and tell stories of innovation, research, risk, policymaking, conflict and change. As a reporter, you will develop story ideas, gather news, conduct interviews, and work on deadline. You will submit stories to reputable publications and add to your journalistic portfolio.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the semester, successful students will:

- Produce news and features on environmental science and natural resource issues
- Apply news values, ethical and professional standards
- Practice developing and pitching story ideas
- Know how to cultivate and interview sources on the environmental beat
- Hone their writing, editing and self-editing skills
- Publish a story in a professional news medium

Course Overview

1 Reporting

You report four enterprise stories over the course of the semester, with mounting levels of sophistication in terms of sources, news value, storytelling and format. You'll be on deadline, and I will hold you to real-world newsroom standards. Make sure to budget enough time for this key course, with a “homework” load of 10+ hours per week. I will provide timely and detailed feedback. You'll rewrite each story once, and may submit a third draft of one story of your choice.

2 Lectures

Topics will range from regulatory issues to reporting tools. I will share tricks of the trade on how to conduct successful interviews, identify news pegs and trends, deal with embargoes, deliver winning story pitches, avoid and translate jargon, and engage the public with compelling stories on complex subjects.

3 Workshops

Lectures will be followed by in-class exercises where you'll practice interviewing, attributing information, translating scientific jargon, structuring narrative, editing, formulating leads and kickers and other techniques.

Tuesday class sessions will typically be set aside for peer review of first drafts, as well as for budget meetings where story ideas will be presented and critiqued. Thursday sessions will explore specific reporting techniques and challenges.

4 Readings

I expect you to read the *Missoulian*, the *Missoula Independent* and *High Country News* on a regular basis to keep up with local and regional issues. In addition, I will provide you with selected articles and materials ahead of certain class sessions, with the expectation that you will have read them before we meet.

Course Tools

These tools are essential for environmental science or natural resource reporters.

- A reliable recording device.
- Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition.
- The AP Stylebook (free via http://www.apstylebook.com/umontana_edu).
- A Twitter account, to follow organizations and individuals on your beat.
- A subscription to the *Missoulian* newspaper; I recommend home delivery.
- Access to Society of Environmental Journalists listservs, for story ideas for this class and beyond. Become a student member (\$25/year) at sej.org.

Assessment

To the journalistic profession, deadlines are key. On the graduate level, there can be no

grace period, not even for a delay of "only" five minutes. As in the industry, the burden of proof is on your side. I highly recommend submitting printed versions of assignments in addition to emailed documents, to avoid an "F" for an email that didn't get through. Don't count on me sending you receipts. I don't know an editor who'd do that.

1 Enterprise stories

4x150 points. Grades will be based on second drafts, but failure to submit a first draft by deadline will automatically result in an "F" for the entire assignment.

2 Written pitches

2x50 points.

3 Science news

1x100 points.

4 Workshops

Participation in peer review, news exercises and class discussion: 200 points.

***Publication requirement**

To receive credit for this course, you must get one of your stories published in a professional media outlet, for example: *Montana Kaimin*, *High Country News*, *Bugle*, *Crown of the Continent*, *Vision*, *Missoula Independent*, *Montana Journalism Review*. Without a clip in hand by Dec. 17, you will receive an "I" for "Incomplete." You will have till the end of Spring Semester 2016 to fulfill the requirement and have the grade converted. If you don't, you'll have to retake JRNL 570 in the fall of 2016.

Professionalism

Journalism is competitive. You must act professionally at all times to succeed. What's true for the newsroom is true for this classroom:

- Meet deadlines. I will not accept late submissions. They will be graded "F".
- To make sure assignments reach me in time is your responsibility.
- You will be forgiven one absence, as long as you notify me ahead of class.
- Don't be late to class.
- In case of emergency, contact me to discuss the problem and negotiate a solution before you miss a deadline or a class.
- Missing one third of classes will automatically result in failing the course.
- Acting professionally throughout will positively affect your course grade; acting unprofessionally will negatively affect your course grade.

Academic Honesty

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the [Student Conduct Code](http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student_conduct.php) (http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student_conduct.php).

A Few Words About Plagiarism

The UM catalog defines plagiarism as the act of “representing another’s work as one’s own.” Those who plagiarize “may fail the course or be remanded to the University Court for possible suspension or expulsion.” In journalism, you’re guilty of plagiarism if you hand in a story that was written in part by someone else (another student, your mother, the *Kaimin*, the *Missoulian*, a website, etc.). That includes writing a story based on reporting not your own. If you must use material from another published source, attribute it.

Same Work for Multiple Classes

You may not submit for this course any assignment that has previously or will be concurrently submitted for another class, unless you receive prior approval from the professor for this course. To do so without permission will result in an "F" for the assignment, and could result in an "F" for the course.

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

This course is accessible to otherwise qualified students with disabilities. To request reasonable program modifications, please consult with the instructor. [Disability Services for Students](http://life.umt.edu/dss) (<http://life.umt.edu/dss>) will assist in the accommodation process.

Class and Deadline Schedule (Subject to Change)

Unless specified otherwise, submit assignments as email attachments (.doc or .docx) **by noon** on deadline day, and bring printed version to class.

- Week 1
- 9/1 Class overview and introductions
- 9/3 Guest speaker: Amy Martin. *Wait, why do we call it “environmental” journalism?*
- Week 2
- 9/8 Guest speaker: *High Country News* Managing Editor Brian Calvert (Skype)
- 9/10 No class (I’m leaving town for my brother’s wedding). Assignment TBA.
- Week 3
- 9/15 Oral pitch, Enterprise Story 1 (Profile)
- 9/17 Attend Roundtable ~~e~~ on the Crown of the Continent
- Week 4
- 9/22 Due: Enterprise Story 1, first draft
- 9/24 Lecture: Navigating state and federal agencies
- Week 5
- 9/29 Due: Enterprise Story 1, second draft
- 10/1 Oral pitch, Enterprise Story 2 (Trend)
- Week 6

- 10/6 Due: Enterprise Story 2, first draft
- 10/8 Interviewing exercise
- Week 7
- 10/13 Due: Enterprise Story 2, second draft
- 10/15 Lecture: Freedom of Information Act
- Week 8
- 10/20 Due: Written pitch, Enterprise Story 3
- 10/22 Due: Email written pitch to editor (bcc me)
- Week 9
- 10/27 Due: Enterprise Story 3, first draft
- 10/29 TBA
- Week 10
- 11/3 Due: Enterprise Story 3, second draft
- 11/5 Lecture: Scientific literature
- Week 11
- 11/10 Due: Science news blurb
- 11/12 A scientist joins us to critique blurbs
- Week 12
- 11/17 Due: Written pitch, Enterprise Story 4 (Reportage)
- 11/19 Due: Email written pitch to editor (bcc me)
- Week 13
- 11/24 Due: Enterprise Story 4, first draft
- 11/26 No class (Thanksgiving)
- Week 14
- 12/1 Due: Enterprise Story 4, second draft
- 12/3 TBA
- Week 15
- 12/8 TBA
- 12/10 Due: Third draft, story of your choice